C. O. 776 [821]

Saint Elijah, (Surrian Il'ia), is the lord of thunder and lightning. Anyone who has been struck by lightning, is thought to have offended this saint and therefore to have been hit by his bullet. Here Elijah has taken the place of the original pagan god of the thunderstorm who hurls his thunderbolt, the lightning, against the dragon which is the cloud, and releases the waters which the demon had kept imprisoned. This is proved by the fact that the same function has been assigned to Elijah and especially to the angel Gabriel in the popular belief of Armenia, where this old Indo-Iranian myth of the slaying of the dragon by the god of the thunderstorm is preserved in a form that is still more complete than that of the rather simplified and less colorful Ossetic version. (Cf. Manuk Abeghian, Der armenische Volksglaube, [Leipsig, 1890], pp. 78ff., and B. Geiger, Die Amesha Spentas, Sitzungsberichte der Wiener Akad. d. Wiss., Vol. 176 [1916], pp. 65ff.) The relatives and friends of a person killed by a lightning express joy and sing and dance, suppressing all tears and sadness over the death of the person, from fear of making Vatsilla angry; this strange custom is obviously the result of a later development of this version of the myth. Like this attitude towards the deceased, the manner in which he is buried also belongs to the sphere of pagan popular belief. The body is either buried at the place of the accident, or it is placed on a

C. O. 766

C.O. 766 two-wheeled carriage drawn by two goats, and the place where the animals stop is thought to have been chosen by Vatsilla. At the grave a black male goat is slaughtered and his skin is hung up on a long pole.

C.O. 776 It is noteworthy that there exists a strange discrepancy between these two saints and the Vastyrdzhi and Vatsilla of the legends of the Narti.[1] Apart from the fact that these legends tell of groups of seven Vastyrdzhi and seven Vatsilla, we are confronted here not only with a difference of numbers, but also with an essential contrast between the characters and functions of the saints and their namesakes in the legends. There appears in the legends, in addition to the groups of seven, two single Vastyrdzhi who is involved in a very un holy affair. He attempts to seduce the mother of one of the Narti families and having been rejected, he waits until her death, visits her grave together with a stallion and a dog, and she gives birth to a girl, a col' and a dog's whelp. The behavior which is ascribed to the Vastyrdzhi in this story is fantastic and repelling. However, the role which the groups of seven Vastyrdzhi and seven Vatsilla play in the legends of the Narti, is no less surprising, though it is free from actions of obscene character. Some of the mightiest heroes of the Narti show an extremely hostile attitude towards these two groups and kill some of them at accidental encounters. They act in the same way against the Zäd (Izäd) and Daväg (Idaväg), who

[1] [i.e. a tribe of mythical heroes, cf. cat. 116, pp. 576-582--Analyst]